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Little Red Herrings -- Designer Codes

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libraries is on its way to the boneyard of library history.²

In the past few years there has been a movement by a few libraries to challenge the big collection as the best collection paradigm. In some cases actual reductions with significant weeding exercises have been undertaken, in many others, major portions of the campus collections have been sent to storage. Now a new report from **OhioLINK** and **OCLC Research** has come out which suggests that the old idea that 80 percent of a library's circulation is driven by 20 percent of the collection was a gross underestimation.³ Based upon 2007/8 circulation data from 16 universities, 23 community colleges, and 50 private and public colleges in Ohio, only 6 percent of these collections was needed to account for 80 percent of their circulation. If this is the case, library funders are bound to ask, do we really need to spend so much on buying, processing, housing and preserving the other 94 percent of the collection? Or, couldn't we meet the needs for the other 94 percent of the materials in a more cost-effective manner?

My own favorite research experience took place more than 30 years ago when I went to the **British Library** to find information about **Robert Morrison**, the first Protestant missionary to China. I had already been using ILL for several years to find information about **Morrison** and his time in China. But on my way to a conference in Moscow I was able to spend a week in London reading. I started out by filling out **British Library** request slips for the materials I had already

identified but not read. As I read these books I would find references to other books and would fill out more request slips for books to read — and then repeat the cycle again and again until I ran out of time. This was research, this was fun. This was also the sort of research experience possible only in libraries which do not just try to buy the most popular books needed to meet 80 percent of everyone's needs.

So, where does this leave us? Do these statistics erode the foundation stones of collection development as we know them — e.g., should we only buy that which will fill the needs of most patrons and ignore the rest or make their collection someone else's responsibility? Should our collaborative organizations focus on providing super fast access to the books which would constitute the other 94 percent of our collections and which will only seldom be read? These are good questions. Collection development work can be as hard as it is fun. 🍷

Endnotes

1. See "Founding of the American Library Association," <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/missionhistory/history/index.cfm>.
2. This decline is admittedly slow. **OCLC** facilitated 10.3 million ILL transactions in 2008/9 and 10.2 million in 2009/10. *OCLC 2009/10 Annual Report*, p. 7.
3. See OhioLINK Collection Building Task Force, **Julia Gammon** and **Edward T. O'Neill**. 2011. *OhioLINK OCLC Collection and Circulation Analysis Project 2011*. Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research. <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2011/2011-06r.htm>

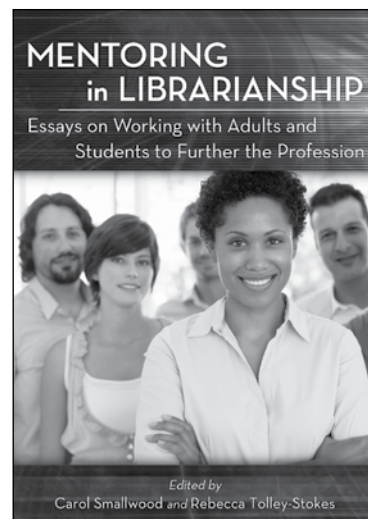
Little Red Herrings — Designer Codes

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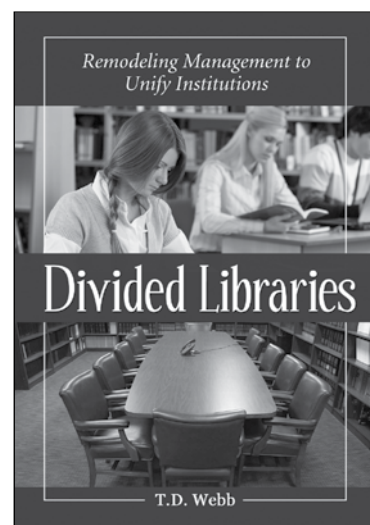
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